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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: AMBASSADOR PRESENTS CREDENTIALS TO PRESIDENT RAHMONOV

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Jacobson, Ambassador, State, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

Classified by Ambassador Jacobson. Reason 1.4(d).

¶11. (U) SUMMARY. On September 4, just one business day after arriving at post, Ambassador Jacobson presented her credentials to Tajik President Emomoli Rahmonov. Rahmonov thanked the United States for its support of counter terrorism and counter narcotics efforts and said he looked forward to greater assistance in economic development. He cited the U.S.-funded bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj as an example of bilateral cooperation that would benefit the region. The government was eager to accept the Ambassador's credentials so she could participate officially in the September 9 Independence Day celebration and the 2700th anniversary of President Rahmonov's home region, Kulyab. END SUMMARY.

GREAT TIMING

¶12. (U) The Ambassador thanked the president for the opportunity to present her credentials immediately after arrival. Rahmonov and some of his senior staff just returned from meetings in Kazakhstan and were pressed for time, but were intent to keep the appointment with the Ambassador. While some ambassadors are made to wait for several months before presenting their credentials, the president remarked, it was important that she be "one of the active members" among the diplomatic corps at the upcoming Independence Day celebrations. Rahmonov said the celebrations will show off the famous Tajik hospitality, and good naturedly predicted the Ambassador would much prefer Tajikistan to her former assignment in Turkmenistan.

Note: For the 15th anniversary of independence, the government will invite the diplomatic corps to a military parade, an evening gala, and a trip to Kulyab on the president's airplane to commemorate 2700 years of Tajik-Persian culture.

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

¶13. (U) After the formal presentation of credentials, President Rahmonov opened the conversation with the Ambassador by stating that for Tajikistan, the relationship with the United States "has always been and always will be" of paramount importance. He said Tajikistan would never engage in any anti-Americanism. The Ambassador said her core mission would be to further strengthen America's relationship with the Tajik government and the Tajik people. She outlined a full range of common interests, which she had discussed earlier with the foreign minister in more detail, including regional integration, border security, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and economic

opportunities including hydropower. She noted that a more transparent economic environment was essential to attracting investment. Washington is keenly interested in the November 6 presidential elections, she said - how these elections are conducted will be important not only for Tajikistan's image but also for the development of the bilateral relationship.

¶4. (C) Rahmonov was most engaging when he broke from his prepared text and reflected on the accomplishments of Tajikistan since the early 1990s. Dushanbe was dead; bread was rationed; fathers and sons killed each other; Islamic flags flew over the current parliament building. He recounted some of the atrocities he witnessed first hand as a "simple deputy," apologizing to the Ambassador for the indelicate descriptions. Such memories, he said, ensure the Tajik people understand the value of peace and stability, and ensure that Tajikistan will be a staunch partner in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics. He recalled the late 1990s and the first anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan when the flow of drugs across the border nearly tripled. At that time he appealed for international support citing the impact not only on Central Asia, but on the wider global community, but his pleas were met with skepticism and ignored. Similarly, he lamented that his offer directly to General Franks immediately after September 11, 2001 to provide a base at Kulyab for the anti-Taliban, anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan was rebuffed. Positively, he recognized that the United States was first among countries in providing humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan throughout Tajikistan's 15 years of independence.

¶5. (SBU) To illustrate Tajikistan's role in the broader Central Asian area, Rahmonov shared a Tajik proverb: "If your neighbor is prospering, it will be fortuitous for you too." He spoke at length about the challenge of integrating Afghanistan into the regional economy and referred to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's bridge project as a major step toward Afghanistan's

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post-war development and Tajikistan's integration with the rest of the world. Noting that it is only 1,600 kilometers to Karachi, the bridge will help eliminate the long overland routes to European seaports and transportation hubs. To reach its goals, he said, Tajikistan must cooperate with all "sincere friends of Tajikistan" who have a role here, including those in the Islamic world, India, Pakistan, China, Russia and European countries. In reference to Uzbekistan, the President mentioned the deaths on the border as a result of landmines, but stopped short of lambasting Karimov, expressing optimism that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan could resolve their differences amicably.

¶6. (U) Rahmonov responded to the Ambassador's desire to see the Tajik presidential elections approach international standards, by noting his "firm position" that the November 6 presidential election should be open and transparent. He reported that during a recent address to parliament he instructed all government structures to follow local laws and international obligations.

¶7. (U) He noted that former Ambassador Hoagland left a new embassy and he hoped that she would leave her own mark on U.S.-Tajik relations. As evidence of his sincere desire to work closely with the United States, Rahmonov referred to his attendance at the new embassy dedication during Ambassador Hoagland's absence due to his Senate confirmation hearing. He pointed out that "no other Central Asian president would have attended a dedication ceremony without the host Ambassador."

MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER NAZAROV

¶8. (SBU) Prior to the credentials ceremony, the Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Nazarov to preview her conversation with the president, and to initiate a dialogue with the Foreign Minister on the entire range of bilateral issues. She highlighted Washington's appreciation for Tajikistan's record in anti-terrorism and anti-narcotics efforts, Secretary Rice's strong interest in supporting the integration of Central and

South Asia, and the enormous opportunities for Tajikistan in the energy sphere. Tajikistan's ability to attract private investors and business partners, she argued, will depend on transparent practices and enforcement of the sanctity of contracts. Similarly, transparent conduct toward NGOs is critical for continued U.S. assistance and the healthy development of democracy. The Ambassador raised the ongoing case of Gerald Metals and recent government pressure on the Portland-based NGO Mercy Corps International as issues she would like to discuss at greater length with the Minister.

¶ 9. (SBU) Nazarov spent considerable time detailing the various hydropower projects underway in Tajikistan. He said that no agreements were finalized at the recent Sochi EurAsEC summit and was clear that Tajikistan would hold out for completing the giant Rogun hydropower project according to its original Soviet-era plans. If Russian aluminum giant RusAl cannot find financing for the full-scale version of the project, Tajikistan will look elsewhere for partners. Nazarov remains optimistic that the situation will be resolved and stated that 95 percent of Afghanistan's energy needs could be met by Tajikistan in the future.

¶ 10. (U) The Ambassador characterized the upcoming presidential election as an excellent opportunity to signal a commitment to a transparent democratic process meeting international standards. A free and fair election, with open access to the media for the political parties, would contribute to the prestige and long-term stability of Tajikistan. He agreed to meet with the Ambassador soon, and regularly, in order to continue to discuss these and other important issues.

¶ 11. (SBU) COMMENT: While neither meeting offered anything new, the Foreign Minister and President had both clearly crafted their talking points to fit their perception of what we wanted to hear. The early credentials meeting was a positive sign, but we will continue to emphasize that it is concrete action - on the elections, business and civil society environments, and security cooperation - that will keep Tajikistan in the "Corridor of Reform.

JACOBSON